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WARREN PRESENTS HIS SWORD
AND SORCERY MAGAZINE IN
PUBLISHED BY WARREN PUBLISHING CO. EDITORIAL AND
BUSINESS OFFICES ARE AT 145 E.
32ND STREET, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10014.
TELEPHONE: (212) 686-0600. ENTRY
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CO. INC. 145 E. 32ND STREET, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10014.
PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

Sword & Sorcery



SCREAM 4

The couple is alone in the forest! Under the towering trees they make love. But, tiny eyes peer out of the darkness! Eyes belonging to dwarves... who also have an appetite for tasty human flesh!



DRAGONSLAYER 18

Here is an exclusive look at one of the biggest and most exciting movies of the year! Dragonslayer, the fantasy epic, is covered in depth with more photos and information than available anywhere!



KINGMAKER 25

"Someday this land shall be free! Someday the Roman Centurions will be thrown out, and the barbarians will be conquered. A man will come and pull this sword from its stone and free England!"



GODDESS 37

Nonja loved the trolls of her kingdom, but this day she was disconsolate. It was summer and she yearned for a human lover. But finding a human, even for a Goddess, was not any easy task!



SCHEHERAZADE 45

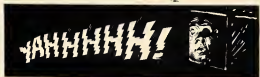
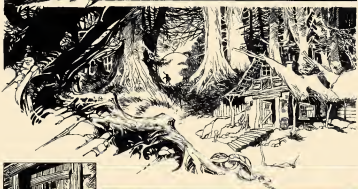
In the days of yore there reigned the Sultan Schahriar Bana Sasan who found his wife in the arms of a slave! Nothing on Earth could withstand his terrible wrath, not even the exotic Scheherazade!



BEAUTY 54

The Princess Aurora was trapped in her haunted castle, awaiting rescue! And the Prince, eager to free her, faced dragons, demons, monsters and all the horrors of the netherworld to reach her!

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A SCREAM IN THE FOREST



SOMEWHERE IN THE FURTHEST DEPTHS OF THE FOREST'S DWELL THOSE MINDLESS CREATURES WE KNOW AS THE "FEARIES". IN TIMES OF PLUNTY, THEY BOTH, US NOT, HOWEVER, WHEN THE LAND IS BARREN AND FOOD BECOMES SCARCE...

...THEY COME OUT OF THE FOREST TO GATHER UP A SUPPLY OF ONE OF THEIR FAVORITE FOODS... WOMEN!

THERE IS NO DEFENSE AGAINST A FEARIE. HIS ENORMOUS SIZE AND STRENGTH IS MORE THAN A MATCH FOR ONE OF OUR RACE. WE KNOW OF NO WOMAN WHO HAS EVER BEEN RESCUED FROM THE CLUTCHES OF A FEARIE.



THE SCREAMS IN THE FOREST ARE THE SCREAMS OF OUR LOST WOMEN BEING SERVED AS FOOD FOR A FEARIE APPETITE.

AND NOW YOU BEGIN TO HEAR THE SCREAMS AGAIN, USSEL! ACH! WHAT ARE WE TO DO?



THAT IS THE HORROR OF IT ALL, FRITZ, WE CAN DO NOTHING AGAINST A FEARIE! IT IS TIME WE JOINED THE OTHER WOOD-CHOPPERS NOW. THEY WILL BE WAITING FOR...!

HERE, MY FRIEND, YOUR AXE, YOU MUST'VE DROPPED IT LAST NIGHT. I FOUND IT ON THE PATHWAY HERE.

IT IS NEARLY MOON BEFORE THE TWO COMPANIONS FINALLY SET OFF FOR THEIR DAYS LUMBER-JACKING.

THE FEARIES! SOMEONE SHOULD DO SOMETHING ABOUT THEM!

YES, SOMEONE SHOULD.

SOMEONE... SHOULD...!

USSEL IS LATE IN GETTING HOME THAT NIGHT.

AT LEAST I HAVEN'T HEARD ANY SCREAMING TONIGHT. PERHAPS THE FEARIES HAVE HAD THEIR BELLY'S FULL.

BUT USSEL WAS SPORIN TOO SOON. A CRACKLING TWIG AWOKE THE WOODSMAN ONLY TOO LATE THAT HE HAD BEEN ATTACKED BY...!

A FEARIE!



WITH A SICKENING THUMP, URSEL IS SLAMMED TO THE GROUND BENEATH THE WEIGHT OF THE FEARE!

HELP!
NICHE!

THE WOOD CHOPPER SLIPS DOWN A PRAYER, AS THE MUSCULAR TERROR RAGES ITS HUGE FIST...



BUT THE INTENDED BLOW IS NEVER LANDED, FOR...

NEVER MIND WHO, WOODSMAN! JUST BACK OFF AND GIVE ME SOME FIGHTING ROOM!

WHO--?!



BUT IF YOU MUST KNOW, MY NAME IS ARN OF WHITLOOK!

GRINCH!

!ARROAR

DAZED BY THE SUDDENNESS OF IT ALL, URSEL OBEYS THE NEWCOMER'S COMMAND. THUS HAVING GAINED HIS FIGHTING ROOM, THE SWORDSMAN FIGHTS!

ARN QUICKLY FINDS THAT HE
SHOULD DO LESS TALKING AND
MORE SWORD-WORK!

UPPP!

SPIRITS OF THE
GLINN PROTECT
THIS BRAVE
WARRIOR.

THE BEAST LEAPS!

YEH STARS
BUT THE THING
CAN THROW!

GET UP!
GET UP!

BUT IT LANDS
ONLY UPON
EMPTY TURF!

GOT TO FIND
A VULNERABLE
SPOT ON THIS
THING LIKE THE
BACK OF HIS...

...NECK!

CLACK!

AH NOBLE
SWORDSMAN! I
AM YOUR SERVANT!
YOUR SLAVE FOR
ALL MY DAYS!

(HA/HA!) NONE OF
THAT, WOODSMAN. IN
THE FOREST, ALL ARE
FREE. BUT I WOULD
ASK A FAVOR OF YOU. I
NEED A PLACE TO STAY
TONIGHT AND...

AND USSSEL HAPPILY AGREES
TO ENTERTAIN ARN FOR THE
REMAINDER OF THE EVENING.

HAVE ANY
IDEA AS TO THE
NATURE OF THAT...
WHATEVER-IT WAS
THAT ATTACKED
YOU?

YAH IT COULD
ONLY HAVE BEEN A FEARIE!
MY HUT IS JUST UP AHEAD
HERE. WHEN WE GET THERE,
I'LL TELL YOU ABOUT
THEM.

WITHIN USSSEL'S
ABODE, THE TALE
IS TOLD.

MY GUESS IS THAT THE FEARIES HAVE
ACQUIRED SUCH ALKING TO HUMAN MEAT
THAT THEY'LL NOW ATTACK PEOPLE FOOD
SHORTAGE OR NO FOOD SHORTAGE! WHY THAT
WOULD EVEN EXPLAIN WHY THAT FEARIE ATTACKED
ME BACK THERE... USUALLY THEY ONLY EAT
FEWELS. THAT'S ONLY A THEORY THOUGH. THE
WOOD NYMPHS HELP US IF IT'S TRUE THOUGH.

SOMEONE
OUGHT TO DO
SOMETHING
ABOUT THE
FEARIES.

BUT FOOD IS
PLENTIFUL AT THIS
TIME OF THE YEAR,
USSSEL. WHY SHOULD
THE FEARIES
ATTACK PEOPLE
NOW?

I'VE NO WAY
OF KNOWING FOR
CERTAIN, FRIEND ARN!
HOWEVER, IF YOU'LL
ALLOW ME TO WAGER
A GUESS...

PLEASE
DO!

HEY!
WHAT ABOUT
YOU? YOU'RE
FANTASIC WITH
THAT BLADE OF
YOUR'S! I'LL BET
YOU COULD...

"HOLD ON THERE, USSSEL!
I'M NOT ABOUT TO
DECLARE WAR ON A
BAND OF PHYSICAL
GIANTS LIKE THE ONE I
MET TONIGHT. I MAY BE
GOOD, BUT I'M NOT
THAT GOOD! YOU'LL JUST
HAVE TO FIND..."

BUT ARN'S WORDS ARE CUT SHORT AS AN EARTH-PERCUSSING SCREAM ONCE MORE RIPS ITSELF THROUGH THE NIGHT AIR!

THE SHRIEL DRY FADES, AND THERE IS SILENCE.

THE MORNING FINDS USSEL AND ARN BACK AT THE SCENE OF THE PREVIOUS NIGHT'S SKIRMISH.

THE THING TO DO IS TO FIND THIS FELLOW'S TRACKS AND FOLLOW THEM BACK TO ITS LAIR.

THE SCREAM!
MEIN GOTT!
THE SCREAM!

NEVER HAVE
I HEARD SUCH
RAW ANGUISH!

USSEL MY
FRIEND...
TOMORROW WE
HUNT THE
FEARFUL!

ARN LEADS THE WAY AS THE
DUO DIG DEEPER INTO THE
FOREST'S GUT.

THE TRACKS GROW
LESS READABLE UNTIL USSEL
SWEARS THERE ARE NO MORE.

IT'S HOWEVER, ARN.
THE TRACKS HAVE
FADED INTO OBLIVION.

NO, THEY ARE
STILL THERE... FANT
BUT STILL THERE.
YOU CANNOT SEE
THEM. IT TAKES A
WARRIOR'S EYES
TO SEE THEM.

LET'S
GET STARTED
THEN!

SO ON THEY GO...

CAREFUL,
USSEL. ONE
SLIP AND...

ARN!
LOOK OUT!

USSEL'S CRY HAS
COME JUST IN
TIME!

BY THE STARS,
A BOULDER
BEING THROWN
AT US!

I'M
LOSING MY
BALANCE, ARN!
HELP ME!

PULL ME
UP, ARN!
PULL ME
UP!

USSEL FALLS...

AND AT THAT INSTANT, BOUNDING ACROSS THE TREE BRIDGES COMES...

IT'S THE
FEARIE WHO
THREW THAT ROCK
AT US! HE'S
COMING TO
FINISH US
OFF!



THIS SWORD'S
A BIT MORE
AWKWARD THAN A
BOOMERANG,
BUT...!

DO
SOMETHING,
ARN! /
QUICKLY!

IT'S GOT
TO SUFFICE!



YOU'VE SAVED
ME AGAIN, ARN, BUT
YOU LOST YOUR
SWORD.

THE FEARIE DISPOSED OF
A JIN PULLS LIZSEL TO SAFETY
ONCE MORE.

WE STILL
GO ON.

WE STILL GO ON
MY WARRIOR'S
BLOOD HAS BEEN
AROUS'D.

AND SO THE TREK CONTINUES ALL THAT DAY AND FAR INTO THE NIGHT.

BUT WHAT IF WE HEAR ANOTHER SCREAM TONIGHT, ARN? WHAT THEN?

ALL THE BETTER, MY FRIEND, WE JUST FOLLOW OUR EARS IN THAT CASE SAY? LOOK AT THAT CAVE OVER THERE! DO YOU SUPPOSE...?

LET'S HAVE A LOOK IN THIS PLACE, USSEL.

HERE'S A CANDLE.

CAUTIOUSLY THE WOODSMAN AND THE SWORDSMAN ENTER.

(GULP!) A SACRIFICIAL ALTAR! THIS IS IT! THIS MUST BE THE HOME OF THE FEARIES!

SO IT WOULD APPEAR.

WITHOUT WARNING...!

AND SO IT IS!

FOR A MOMENT THERE IS SILENCE. THEN, A SMALL SHUFFLING OF FEET--AND THE FEARIES APPEAR!

HELLO AGAIN, GOONS! I'VE RETURNED! HERE'S YOUR MEAT FOR TONIGHT.

THE FEARIES REPLY THAT THEY'VE UNDERSTOOD ARN BY PICKING USSEL UP AND...!

IT'S A PLEASURE DOING BUSINESS WITH YOU FEARIES! YOU SUPPLY ME WITH DIAMONDS, I SUPPLY YOU WITH NICE, FRESH HUMAN MEAT! A BARGAIN ON BOTH SIDES, EH?



WARREN MAGAZINES

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of SUPERMAN'S
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in spotlight on-- **DRAGONSLAYER**

It's an era that only Conan the Barbarian could love! Or, if not love... survive!

It's the beginning of the Sixth century, a time when Celts, Angles, and Saxons are warring for the land that is now England.

It's a time of peril!

Of magic! Of... monsters!

urlanders' plight

A ragtag band of travellers led by a youth named Valerian (Caitlin Clark) comes to the gate

of the castle of the old enchanter Ulrich (Sir Ralph Richardson).

Ulrich is the last sorcerer on earth, the only man who can still command the elements, cast spells, summon or exile spirits, transmute one object into another. He can also levitate things and see into the future.

The Urlanders have come to beg Ulrich for his help in a problem most dire:

"Our homes and our families are being ravaged by a terrible dragon," says Valerian. "No one has the skill or courage to fight him."



That's the spear it, Galen!



The dragon & its dragonette (baby behemoth).



The sacrificial maiden cowers before the terrifying prospect of being devoured by the dragon.



Ulrich the Enchanter (Sir Ralph) foresees his own imminent doom.

Valerian finds it almost as difficult to pronounce the monster's name: Vermithrax Pejorative!

Reluctantly, Ulrich consents to help the Urlanders.

But the best laid plans of mice and sorcerers are worthless if the sorcerer dies . . . and that's just what happens before the band is able to return to Urland.

Instead, the travellers are forced to return with only the untried . . . inexperienced . . . but bold sorcerer's apprentice Galen (Peter MacNicol).

we're off to see the dragon!

Galen (no relation to the simian star of the TV series PLANET OF THE APES) is not quite alone in this matter of dragonslaying.

He has the magic amulet of his mentor!

And Galen's first feat of magic, upon setting foot in Urland, is to summon forth a colossal landslide, which buries the dragon inside its lair deep within a cavern.

But—there's a problem.

By turns, the dragon works its way from Galen's trap. With a vengeance, Vermithrax Pejorative smashes through the countryside, razing village after village.

Galen knows that he has blown it.

What's worse, the Princess Elspeth (Chloe Samman) is selected by lottery to be sacrificed to the monster, to appease it.

Using his magic powers, and the strong arm of the blacksmith Simon (Emrys James), Galen forges a mighty lance!

Valerian, in the meanwhile, helps construct a fireproof shield using dragon scales.

With these two mighty weapons in-hand, the sorcerer's apprentice sets out for a duel to the death with Vermithrax Pejorative.

where there's smoke, there's vermithrax

But the task is going to prove far more complex than the stalwart Galen imagined!

For one thing, Vermithrax is but one of several dragons. Its children dwell in a lake of fire, which Galen must cross to reach the monster supreme!

For another, there are people who would just as soon see Galen fail as succeed!

However—there is one power, one incredible force which the youth will find at his disposal!

A power so great as to defy mortal or serpentine understanding!

And Galen will encounter it when he least expects it . . .

The last time Walt Disney Productions gave us a sorcerer's apprentice was in 1940, when Mickey Mouse unsuccessfully tackled an army of ram-paging brooms.

Now, in conjunction with Paramount Pictures—their second co-production since last year's POPEYE—Walt Disney Productions presents—**DRAGONSLAYER!**



No, it's not a bird...not Rodan...not a terrordactyl...it's the flying dragon! Inset: an exclusive photo to **PM** showing the dragon's handsome profile!

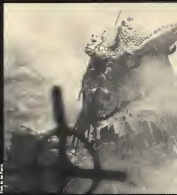
Just to tease and arouse your curiosity a bit further, it should be pointed out that Dragonslayer is not young Galen!

working for scale(s)

The man who plays the pivotal role of Ulrich in **DRAGONSLAYER** is one of the most respected actors in the world. Sir Ralph Richardson (who starred in the long-ago H.G.Wells SF classic **THINGS TO COME**) has been acting professionally for sixty years, though this is the first time he has starred in a monster movie! The eighty-year-old actor was, fittingly, dubbed a knight in 1974.

Young Peter MacNicol appears as Galen Bradwardyn, who must battle Vermithrax Pejorative. It is no help to Galen that Peter's real father is a member of the clergy, or that before he became an actor, Peter wanted to be a paleontologist and study dinosaurs. This film gave him the chance to study a giant lizard close-up.

Actually, Peter admits that facing the dragon was not the most difficult part of his role in the picture. As an apprentice sorcerer, he had to master sleight-of-hand tricks to perform in the film. "I hated magic when I was a kid," he admits, "because it's so frustrating not being able



Closeup of the dragon. (Too close for comfort!)



The laze in the dragon's lair is about to meet Prince Sirkk, alas!

to follow something that is obviously happening in front of your eyes." Now that he knows how it all works, thanks to tutoring by magician Harold Taylor, he finds it a most fascinating art.

clash of the titans?

It's unusual that two big-budget (\$14 million) films will appear in the same month with virtually the same plot.

That's what happened here.
CLASH OF THE TITANS ... DRAGON-SLAYER.

A princess in distress!
A young hero with magic weapons!
A marauding monster!
An ancient setting!



GALEN



VALERIAN



ULRICH



A dragonette finds the body of the recently deceased young lady to be a rare delicacy.

And one thing more: stop motion monsters! Whereas the incredible creatures in **CLASH OF THE TITANS** were animated by the brilliant Ray Harryhausen, the demonic Vermithrax Pejorative was brought to frame-at-a-time life by up-and-coming stop motion stars Phil Tippett and Dave Bonnet, who work for George Lucas' Industrial Light and Magic Inc.

The miniature model was melded in the film with footage of a life-size mockup of the dragon, built the same size as the "real" monster: forty feet long with a ninety foot wingspan!

Ironically, **DRAGONSLAYER** was shot at the Pinewood Studios in London, at the same time **CLASH OF THE TITANS** was filming there as well!

In fact, Harryhausen paid a visit to the Disney/Paramount set on one of the days when the giant dragon model was being used. Thus, he was



In the stainless-steel-and-glass fire-water cavern of the dragon, young Gaden (Peter MacNicol) is about to have a heated argument with the legendary cave-dweller.

present to witness the technicians turn on the gas for the beast to spit flame—and saw the intense heat incinerate the metal and plastic head!

But the special effects setback was overcome, and DRAGONSLAYER has emerged quite a remarkable film.

The miniature, baby dragons were all Yoda-like puppets operated by the talented people of the Lucas studio, with help from the Disney special effects team.

draggin' out dragons

So . . . in the tradition of such classic dragon films as—

SIEGFRIED
THE MAGIC SWORD
THE 7th VOYAGE OF SINBAD (Harryhausen)

THE SWORD AND THE DRAGON
And THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF THE BROTHERS GRIMM (where a stop motion serpent menaced Buddy Hackett, who grabbed a sword and hacked it)—we now have

DRAGONSLAYER . . . a modern-day ancient classic!



Sydney Bromley, who plays Sir Ralph Richardson's ancient retainer in the film, is felled by an unknown assailant's arrow.

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

TAUNTAUN ACTION FIGURE



TAUNTAUN ACTION CREATURE The incredible snow creature from the ice planet Hoth that carries Han Solo on a dangerous mission across the icy wastes. An especially designed trap door on the Tauntaun's back allows for the insertion of your action figure. When the action figure is removed, the trap door closes. The Tauntaun stands on its hind legs which are movable as are its paws. This action figure is molded in detailed grey and brown plastic for that authentically furry appearance! #26231—\$12.95

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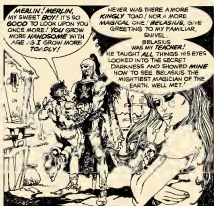
"I AM MERLIN, AND THESE ARE THE PERILOUS DAYS UNDER THE TYRANNOUS RULE OF ROME! ONE DAY ENGLAND SHALL BE SET FREE AND UNITED INTO A MIGHTY EMPIRE! BUT THOSE DAYS ARE YET TO COME! FOR NOW, THE LAND IS GROUND UNDER THE HEEL OF ROMAN LEGIONS!"



The Kingmaker









I THINK YOU,
MERLIN, REMEMBER
MY HUMBLE HOUSE!
BUT IT MAY BE A
TREAT FOR YOUR
LOVELY COMPANION.



THIS, DEAR GIRL, IS
WHERE YOUR MASTER
LEARNED HIS LETTERS WHEN
HE WAS BUT A BOY! THIS IS
THE CRYSTAL CAVE! THE
WELL OF GALARIS!
FONTES GALARIS!



GOOD TO HAVE YOU HOME
AGAIN, MY SON! I HAVE
ENJOYED HEARING THE MANY
TALES OF THE FABLED
MERLIN DOWN THROUGH THE
YEARS.
BUT I KNOW THIS IS
MORE THAN A SOCIAL
VISIT...!




AND AS TIME CAN BE
PRESSING, COME ALONG INTO
THE FORGE ROOM. MY
BLACKSMITH SHOP HAS BEEN
BUSY. I'VE WORKED
NINETEEN YEARS ON
THIS...



MY FINEST
CREATION!

THE
KINGMAKER!



FORGED BY HAND FROM THE
METAL OF A SCORE OF STAR
SPLINTERS, STILL AROLEN
FROM THEIR FALL FROM HEAVEN.
HAFT AND HANDLE WROUGHT
FROM THE RICHEST GOLD SPUN
INTO HAIR FINE THREADS.
TRULY, THE KINGMAKER!



TRULY... THE
KINGMAKER! THE
KEY TO A DOOR
WHICH WILL OPEN
UPON A NEW
WORLD.

AND THE
STONE?

IT IS HERE! THE
LEARNING STONE!
WHEREIN LIES

STORED THE KNOWLEDGE OF
THE INFINITE, TEN TIMES TEN
HUNDRED THOUSAND YEARS
OLD, THE STONE INTO WHICH A
MILLENNIUM OF THE EARTH'S
WISEST KINGS, LORDS, AND
WIZARDS HAVE CAST THEIR
KNOWLEDGE...

...HERE TO KEEP, HERE
AMASSSED TO ONE DAY ALTER
THE FALTERING DESTINY OF AN
IGNORANT WORLD! NOW,
MERLIN, TAKE THE GOLDEN
KEY... CAST IT INTO THE
STONE... LET THE TRANSFER
OF WISDOM BEGIN INTO IT...
AND LET NO MAN PULL IT...

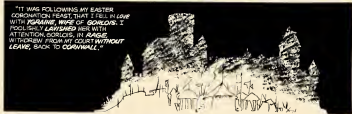
...NO MAN AT LEAST
WHO IS NOT FIT TO
WIELD THE POWER AND
KNOWLEDGE IT
BRINGS...

HENCE THIS
HOUR, WHOEVER
PULLETH THE
SWORD FROM THE
STONE SHALL BE
KING OF ALL
ENGLAND! GOD
BLESS
ENGLAND!

SSHHAANGGG

NEVER HAS THERE
BEEN SUCH A THING
IN HEAVEN AND
EARTH! NEVER
HAS THE NEED FOR
IT BEEN SO ONE!
NEVER AGAIN WILL
I COME SO CLOSE
TO GOD... THAN IN
THIS HOUR...
BEHOLD, THE
SWORD IN THE
STONE!





"IT IS AS I'VE FORESEEN,
UTHER! YOUR OWN RAGE AT
BEING SLIGHTED BY GORLOIS
RAISED YOUR ARMY AND BROUGHT
THEM TO BE BUTCHERED AT
THE DUKE'S CASTLE."



"YOU WILL KEEP GORLOIS
TRAPPED INSIDE THE WALLS
OF HIS CASTLE WITH THE BLOOD OF
YOUR OWN BRAVE MEN. BUT THE
WOMAN, YERAWNE, IS NOT
THEREIN."



"NO! GORLOIS HAS TRICKED
YOU. HE HAS KEPT THE BEAUTIFUL
YERAWNE SECRETED AWAY IN YOUR OWN
CASTLE. YOU WASTE YOURSELF
HERE, IF YOU EVER HOPE TO
HAVE HER FOR YOUR OWN."



"AMASS YOUR MEN, WHEN THE
DAWN TIDE RISES, SEND THEM
AGAINST GORLOIS' ONCE MORE.
MAKE THEM CLAMOR FOR
THE DUKE'S BLOOD."



"WATCH THEM AS THEY STREAM
TOWARD DEATH AND DESTRUCTION!"



"WATCH THEM BASH! UPON THE
GRANITE WALLS LIKE WAVES OF THE
SEA! WATCH THEIR GLORY SWIRL
AND RISE LIKE DEATH'S BLOODY
FOUNTAIN! THEN LET THE DRUM
BATTLE CHIME... WHILE WE GO
UNTO YOUR OWN CASTLE, UTHUR...
THE COMELY YERAWNE TO STEAL!"

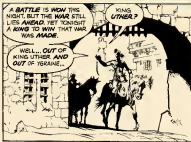


"GIVE THEM THE
SIGNAL TO ATTACK!"









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IN THE EARLY PART OF THE SUMMER, SADNESS CAME TO THE KINGDOM OF THE TROLLS... NOT TO THE TROLLS THEMSELVES, BUT TO A GODDESS WHO WAS IN THEIR MIDST.

GF

IT CAME ON A HOT, MUDDY DAY WHEN WHAT THE TROLLS REALLY WANTED TO DO WAS TAKE OFF THEIR CLOTHES AND GO DOWN TO THE SWIMMING PUDDLE (OF COURSE THEY COULDN'T BECAUSE TROLLS DON'T WEAR CLOTHES). THEY TRIED TO CONTENT THEMSELVES WITH SHEARING OFF EXCESS FUR, BUT AS EVERYONE KNOWS, TROLLS ARE NEVER CONTENT.

GF

WHILE THEY GROWLED AND GRUMBLED ABOUT THE HUMIDITY, SADNESS CAME TO THE GODDESS, NONJA. THE TROLLS, WHEN THEY NOTICED HER, MELANCHOLY, TRIED TO CHEER HER. THEY DID DID CARTWHEELS, MADE RACES, TOLD JOKES, AND DID FOLK-DANCES, BUT NONJA REMAINED MISTY-EYED.

GF

EVEN MISTY-EYED, NONJA WAS AS FAIR A GODDESS AS THE TROLLS'D EVER SEEN. THOUGH ADMITTEDLY GODDESSES WERE RARE IN THESE PARTS BECAUSE, SENSITIVE, HONEST, SHE MADE THE TROLLS FEEL LESS LIKE THE SCRUFFY CREATURES THEY WERE AND MORE LIKE... MEN.

GF

NONJA'S PARENTS WERE HUMAN. THE TROLLS, AS THEY WERE WONT TO DO, HAD KIDNAPPED HER DURING INFANCY AND RAISED HER AS ONE OF THEIR OWN. NONJA ASSIMILATED THEIR MANNERS AND CUSTOMS, FOLLOWING THE ONLY EXAMPLE THAT HAD EVER BEEN SET FOR HER.

AS SHE MATURED, SHE BEGAN TO PERCEIVE THAT SHE WAS DIFFERENT FROM HER TROLL GUARDIANS. IN MANY WAYS NEITHER SHE NOR THEY COULD FULLY UNDERSTAND

BROUGHT UP IN A SHOWN-MAN'S LAND, IT SEEMED INEVITABLE THAT NONJA WOULD CHOOSE HER MATE FROM AMONG ITS DENIZENS. THERE WERE NO OTHER SPECIES IN SIGHT.

TROLLS, BY NATURE, ARE SELFISH, ACQUISITIVE, INSENSITIVE, CHAUVINISTIC, IMPATIENT AND INSECURE. IF THEY WEREN'T SO DAMNED CUTE, THEY WOULDN'T HAVE ANY FRIENDS AT ALL. NOT THAT THEY MEAN ANY HARM. IN FACT, SOMETIMES THEY REALLY TRY TO BE NICE, BUT THEY ARE PRONE TO MISCONCEIVE AND HAVE SHORT ATTENTION SPANS.

IN FACT, MORE THAN ONE TROLL HAD BEGGED HER TO TAKE THEM AS HER MATE YET, BY THE TIME SHE DECIDED TO GIVE EACH A TRY, HE HAD NODDERED OFF, DISTRACTED TO BE WITH HIS OWN KING LEAVING NONJA TO PUZZLE WHY.

Goddess in a Kingdom of Trolls

AT FIRST, SHE BLAMED HERSELF FOR THE FAULTY RELATIONSHIPS, BUT THE TRUTH WAS THIS: TROLLS ARE TROLL-GODDESSES ARE GODDESSES. NEITHER CAN FULLY KNOW THE OTHER... NO THEY CAN NEVER TRULY LOVE.

TROLLS CAN'T CHANGE THEIR NATURE ANYMORE THAN A ROCK OR TREE OR WATER OR GODDESS CAN. INTELLIGENCE AND FREE WILL, NOTWITHSTANDING, WE ARE WHAT WE ARE BECAUSE WE ARE!

IT WAS A SIMPLE QUESTION OF IDENTITY. SHE WAS TRAPPED... DOOMED... A GODDESS IN A KINGDOM OF TROLLS.

WHEN THE WIZARD, A TROLL WHO WAS A LITTLE MORE CONCEITED, OBNOXIOUS AND SEMILE THAN MOST, HAD SWORN TO MAKE NONJA HIS BRIDE, EVEN THOUGH SHE HAD REBUKED HIS EVERY ADVANCE.

MEANWHILE NONJA REALIZED THAT ANY HOPES OF FINDING A SUITABLE MATE LAY OUTSIDE THE KINGDOM OF THE TROLLS...

... SO BIDDING FAREWELL TO THE LAND OF HER YOUTH, SHE BRAVELY SET OUT FOR THE WOODS AND WHATEVER DESTINY AWAITED HER.

SO, IT'S A HUMAN LOVER SHE WOULD HAVE! VERY WELL, AS LONG AS I HEAR THIS RAT I WILL LOOK LIKE A MAN! MAYBE THEN SHE WILL ACCEPT ME!

SHE'S GONE!

HOW COULD SHE DO THIS TO ME? NOW... WHEN I'VE FINALLY FOUND THE RIGHT RAT! WHY?

WAIT... FOOTPRINTS LEADING INTO THE WOODS! SHE COULD GET LOST OR HURT OR WORSE... SHE COULD FIND A REAL HUMAN! I'D BETTER GO AFTER HER!

ALMOST IMMEDIATELY, NONJA REGRETTED HER DECISION TO LEAVE THE KINGDOM OF TROLLS. BACK IN HER ADOPTED HOME, IT WAS SAFE. THE TROLLS, AS A RULE, OFFERED HER PROTECTION AND SECURITY, IN LIEU OF NONJA'S LOVE. BUT OUT HERE, SHE HAD NEITHER.

EVEN AT THE HEIGHT OF DAY, IT WAS DARK. TREES LINED THE PATH LIKE WITCHSTICKS, AND A GREY, SWIRLING FOG OBSCURED THE ROAD AHEAD. SHE COULD BARELY DISTINGUISH SILHOUETTES ON THE HORIZON, SO SHE WALKED CAUTIOUSLY LIKE A SWIMMER EASING INTO A POOL OF COLD WATER.



SHE THOUGHT OF TURNING BACK, BUT SHE ALREADY KNEW WHAT LAY BEHIND HER. THE PROSPECT OF ADVENTURE AND DISCOVERY URGED HER FORWARD. FINALLY PINK SHADOWS SETTLED IN, AND AT SUNSET, SHE DECIDED SHE'D TRAVELLED ENOUGH FOR ONE DAY.

SHE LAY DOWN TO REST AMONG THE LEAVES.



DURING THE NIGHT, A HUNTER PASSED HER WAY... A HARD, SCRUFFY MAN OF EARTH WHO CARRIED BOW AND ARROWS, WHICH SHE'D NEVER BEFORE SEEN.



A WOMAN SLEEPING ALONE IN THE FOREST! DON'T YOU KNOW HOW DANGEROUS IT IS? THERE'RE WILD ANIMALS AND TROLLS ALONG THIS ROAD. JUST WAITING TO DO YOU HARM!

WHO ARE YOU?

A SIMPLE MAN... A HUNTER CALLED GORE.



ARE YOU LOST?

NO... I'M LOOKING FOR SOME ONE RATHER THAN SOME PLACE.

NONJA COULDN'T SAY WHY, BUT SHE FELT INTIMIDATED BY GORE. HE WAS THE FIRST HUMAN SHE HAD ENCOUNTERED SINCE INFANCY... HE SEEMED STRANGE, ALIEN, NOTHING LIKE THE TROLLS.

SO WHEN HE LEANED FORWARD TO KISS HER, SHE INSTINCTIVELY BACKED AWAY.



HER REACTION TO HIM WAS AMBIVALENT. ON ONE HAND, HE WAS A NEW AND FASCINATING CREATURE... ON THE OTHER HE WAS DISAPPOINTING. HUMANS AREN'T AS MAGICAL OR PLAYFUL AS TROLLS. GORE WAS MOODY AND TENSED TOWARD SOMETHING UNSETTLING SILENCE.



DON'T BE OFFENDED. IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE I'VE SHARED HUMAN COMPANIONSHIP. IT WILL TAKE SOME GETTING USED TO.

THAT'S QUITE ALL RIGHT. YOU'LL FIND THAT HUMANS HAVE A LOT MORE PATIENCE THAN TROLLS.

BEFORE LONG, NONJA AGAIN DROVE INTO SLEEP. GORE WATCHED OVER HER, AND TOOK SIMPLE PLEASURE IN THE GENTLE STIRRINGS OF THE BEAUTIFUL GODDESS AS SHE DREAMED HER RESTLESS DREAMS ABOUT TROLLS AND MEN.

IN THE MORNING, THE SUN FILTERED THROUGH THE TREES, AND AGAIN LIT THE PATH.



NONJA BID FAREWELL TO GORE AND WENT ON HER WAY. HE CONTINUED IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION, TRACKING A FEROCIOUS BEAST WHOSE TRAIL HE'D BEEN FOLLOWING FOR DAYS.

NONJA WAS SLOWLY REALIZING THAT NO TROLL, MAGIC, NO ILLUSIONS, COULD RIVAL THE WONDER

OF LIFE, THE NATURAL ORDER OF CREATION OF WHICH SHE WAS A PART.



SO LOST IN THESE THOUGHTS WAS NONJA THAT SHE DIDN'T HEAR THE APPROACH OF THE BEAST.

WHAT WILL YOU DO NOW?



CONTINUE TO EXPLORE THE FOREST, AND FURTHER MY OWN QUEST, I SUPPOSE.

VERY WELL, JUST TAKE CARE THAT YOU RECOGNIZE THE OBJECT OF YOUR QUEST WHEN YOU SEE IT. IF YOU PASS IT BY ONCE, YOU COULD SEARCH FOREVER WITHOUT FINDING IT AGAIN.



HELP!

GROOOWWWW

AAAAARRRRGH





WITH THAT, HE WENT AWAY AGAIN, DRAGGING THE BEAST'S CARCASS BEHIND HIM. NONJA STARTED TO CALL OUT TO STOP HIM. SHE WANTED TO SAY SOMETHING MORE, BUT SHE COULDN'T THINK OF THE PROPER WORDS, SO SHE TOO, TURNED AND RESUMED HER JOURNEY.



WITH A SPELL OF IMMOBILITY!



NONJA WALKED WELL INTO THE AFTER-NOON. HER FEET WERE GROWING SORE AND SHE WAS HUNGRY.



WHO ARE YOU?



SO GOOD THAT NONJA NEVER NOTICED THAT THE REFLECTION CAST UPON THE WATER WAS THAT OF HYMIS THE TROLL-WIZARD, AND NOT A PRINCE AT ALL.



THE PLAIN TRUTH WAS THAT NONJA SAW WHAT SHE **WANTED** TO SEE. HE WAS EXACTLY THE SORT OF MAN SHE **HOPED** TO FIND. HER DEALS **PERSONIFIED** SO SHE NEVER STOPPED TO QUESTION HIS VAUDITY, WHICH WAS OF COURSE WHAT THE WIZARD HAD **COUNTED ON**.

DEEPER INTO THE FOREST HE LED HER, TAKING PLEAS TO STEER HER AWAY FROM THE DIRECTION WHERE GORE STOOD **FROZEN**.

THIS RICH LAND WILL BE AT YOUR FINGERTIPS! VASSALS AND SLAVES SHALL YOU **COMMAND**! YOU WILL WANT FOR NO EARTHLY POSSESSIONS, IF YOU **CONSENT** TO BE MY **BRIDE**!



BUT PRINCE, YOU SAID NOTHING ABOUT **LOVE**!



NONJA SMILED, ENCHANTED, AND HYMIS GREW MORE **CONFIDENT** OF HIS VICTORY.

LIKE ALL TROLLS, HE WAS EXPERT AT TELLING PEOPLE WHAT THEY **WISHED** TO HEAR.



HE WAS LIKE A **PACKAGE** THAT HAD BEEN BEAUTIFULLY **GIFT-WRAPPED** BUT WAS EMPTY INSIDE. SOMEHOW NONJA **SENSED** THIS, AND TACTFULLY **EVASIED** HIS PROPOSAL.

I AM HUNGRY MY PRINCE.

THEN I SHALL FIND FOOD FOR YOU, MY **BELOVED**. STAY HERE AND **REST**... I'LL RETURN SHORTLY.



HYMIS, OLD BOY, WHY DON'T YOU THINK OF THIS BEFORE IT'S TOO EASY! IT IS TO DECEIVE HUMANS AND GODDESSES, BECAUSE THEY WANT TO BE DECEIVED!



THEY SPEND THEIR WHOLE LIVES SEEKING SECURITY, POWER, AND COMFORT WHICH ARE ILLUSIONS IN THEMSELVES! IT'S THIS DESIRE FOR ILLUSION THAT MAKES THEM EASY TO **MANIPULATE**!

HIS BAGNET FILLED TO BRIMMING, HYMIS STARTED HIS RETURN WHEN...

THE SWEETEST MUSIC I'VE EVER HEARD! IT'S COMING FROM THAT DIRECTION!

LIKE A SWAN SONG, THE EARLY, HAUNTING MELODY DRIFTED, CARRIED BY THE GENTLE SUMMER BREEZE. THE WIZARD-PRINCE RAISED, LISTENED CLOSELY AND TRACED THE SOUND TO ITS SOURCE.



"A WOMAN!
THE MOST
BEAUTIFUL
I'VE EVER
SEEN!"

THAT WASN'T ENTIRELY TRUE, BUT TROLLS BEING TROLLS, HE REJECTED TRUTH TO HIS NATURE.



"COME...LET
ME SHOW YOU MY
KINGDOM!"



"GOOD DAY,
BEAUTIFUL
GODDESS..."

"WHO ARE
YOU?"

"A RICH AND POWERFUL
PRINCE, AS HANDSOME AN
ELIGIBLE BACHELOR AS CAN
BE FOUND IN THESE PARTS."

HE USED THAT LINE BEFORE, BUT IT WORKED ONCE, SO HE SAW NO REASON NOT TO REPEAT IT.



ABSENTLY, THE WIZARD PUT DOWN
THE BASKET OF FRUIT.

ALL THOUGHTS OF NONJA AND HER RUMOR VANISHED FROM HIS MIND. WHAT REMAINED WAS THE OVERWHELMING AND UNREPRESSABLE DESIRE HE FELT FOR THIS NEW CREATURE.



THE DAY YIELDED TO NIGHT AND STARS SHONE IN A CLEAR, SUMMER SKY. NONJA SAT WHERE THE WIZARD HAD LEFT HER.

GIVING NO THOUGHT TO HER SAFETY, SHE SET OUT IN SEARCH OF HIM.

"HE'S TAKEN FAR TOO LONG. SOMETHING'S HAPPENED! PERHAPS A WILD BEAST DEVoured HIM, OR WORSE!"



SOON ENOUGH SHE FOUND HIM AND JUMPING UP HIS A** FELL OFF!

"MY PRINCE!"

"WHY YOU'RE NOT A PRINCE...YOU'RE HYPER THE WIZARD. JUST ANOTHER TROLL!"



TEARS FILLED HER SOFT EYES. SHE WANTED TO LOSE HERSELF IN THE FOREST, TO HIDE... TO BE FREE OF BOTH MEN AND TROLLS.

SLOW DOWN!
LET ME EXPLAIN!



LISTEN, KID. I'M SORRY ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED. MY INTENTIONS WERE SINCERE IN THE BEGINNING... I DIDN'T COUNT ON BEING SIDE-TRACKED, I GUESS. THAT'S JUST THE WAY WE TROLLS ARE.

NONJA AGREED TO DO AS THE WIZARD SUGGESTED, FOR, IN THE END, SHE KNEW HE WAS RIGHT. AT LEAST WITH GORE, THERE'D BE NO ILLUSIONS, NO DECEPTIONS...
...AND HE WAS ONE OF HER OWN KIND! HE COULD UNDERSTAND HER, APPRECIATE HER AS NO TROLL COULD.



TELL YOU WHAT I'LL DO FOR YOU, THOUGH, GORE, THE HUNTER CARES ABOUT YOU, PROBABLY MORE THAN I EVER COULD. I'LL UNDO THE SPELL THAT I PUT HIM UNDER AND TELL YOU WHERE TO FIND HIM.



A TROLL? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH MY PRINCE?

I'VE A CONFESSION TO MAKE, THERE NEVER WAS A PRINCE. HE WAS JUST ME IN DISGUISE. I'VE CAUSED ENOUGH PAIN FOR ONE DAY. I GUESS I JUST HAVE TO ACCEPT THE FACT THAT I AM A TROLL, AND ALWAYS WILL BE.



I SUPPOSE YOU'RE RIGHT. I WAS A SORCERESS LIKE YOURSELF. I THOUGHT I COULD ACHIEVE HIGHER STATUS BY FINDING A HUMAN LOVER, BUT WHAT DID I END UP WITH? ANOTHER TROLL!

FACE IT, FREN.
NO MATTER HOW CLEVER WE THINK WE ARE, DESTINY WILL STILL HAVE ITS WAY WITH US. WE MAY AS WELL STOP FIGHTING IT.



Scheherazade

IN DAYS OF YORE AND TIME LONG GONE BEFORE,
THREE REIGNED THE KINGS OF KINGS, THE
SULTAN SCAMMORR BANU SASAN...

...A BENEVOLENT RULER, REVERED BY HIS SUB-
JECTS AND FEARED BY HIS COVERTUS NEIGHBORS.

NOW, THE
SULTAN HAD A WIFE
WHOM HE LOVED MORE
THAN ALL THE WORLD. HIS
GREATEST HAPPINESS WAS TO
SURROUND HER WITH THE FINEST
LADIES AND THE MOST BEAUTIFUL
JEWELS. BUT, ALAS, THE SPOILED
QUEEN WISHED FOR MORE.
TO HIS DEEPEST SHAME AND
CRUISING SORROW, SCAM-
MORR SURPRISED HIS WIFE
IN THE ARMS OF A PAL-
ACE SLAVE!

OVERCOME WITH RAGE, HIS REASON BLINDED
BY FURY, THE MONARCH DREW HIS
SCIMITAR AND MERCILESSLY SLEW THE
OBJECTS OF HIS DISTRESS!

HE THEN FLED HIS PALACE HOPING VAINLY
TO LEAVE HIS MISERY BEHIND.



NOW, SHAHRIAR HAD AN ELDER BROTHER, SHAHSEMAN, WHO RULED THE NEIGHBORING KINGDOM OF SAMARKHAND, AND THE MISERABLE SULTAN JOURNEYED TO HIS BROTHER'S SIDE... AND TOLD HIM OF HIS WIFE'S **BETRAYAL**. THOUGH MOVED BY SHAHRIAR'S PLIGHT, SHAHSEMAN COUNSELED THAT THERE WAS NAUGHT TO DO BUT **FORGET**. ONLY TIME ITSELF COULD HEAL THE BETRAYED KING'S HEART!



SHAHRIAR LINGERED IN HIS BROTHER'S DOMAIN, TRYING VAINLY TO ASSUAGE THE SORROW OF HIS LOSS. THEN, ONE DAY, WHEN THE ELDER KING JOINED THE HUNT, SHAHRIAR CHANCED UPON THAT PORTION OF THE PALACE RESERVED FOR HIS BROTHER'S BEAUTEOUS WIFE.

BESIDE HER WERE THREE AND TWENTY CONCUBINES, EACH A MODEL OF COMELINESS AND SYMMETRY. THEY STRIPPED THEMSELVES OF THEIR RAIEMENTS, AND LO, SHAHRIAR BEHELD...! PALACE GUARDS SLIPPED INTO THE PRIVATE GARDENS, AND EACH PAIRED WITH A ROYAL BEAUTY.



WHEN SHAHRIAR BEHELD THE CONDUCT OF HIS BROTHER'S WIFE AND CONCUBINES, HE SAID TO HIMSELF, "BY ALLAH! MY OWN PLIGHT IS LIGHTER THAN THIS! THIS SHOWS ME THAT ALL WOMEN SEEK TO DECEIVE AND MAN NOR KING IS SAFE FROM THEIR MALICE!"

AND HE RESOLVED TO TELL HIS BROTHER, **ALL**.

"OH, MY BROTHER, I WOULD NOT BELIEVE THEE TO LIE," PROCLAIMED THE ELDER KING. "BUT MY HEART WILL NOT ALLOW ME TO CREDIT YOUR TALE UNTIL I HAVE SEEN THIS TREASONERY WITH MINE OWN EYES!" THEREUPON, THE CUNNING MONARCH ANNOUNCED HIS INTENT TO TRAVEL. AND BOTH BROTHERS JARED FORTH FROM THE CITY, ONLY TO RETURN IN SECRET.

THEY STOOD IN THE LATTICE OVERLOOKING THE GARDEN. PRESENTLY THE QUEEN AND CONQUEROR CAME FORTH, HALTING NEAR THE FOUNTAINS THEY SHED THEIR GARBS AND, AS BEFORE, THE PALACE GUARDS APPEARED.



BOTH RULERS, STRICKEN, TURNED AWAY AND LEFT THE ROYAL PALACE, VOWING NEVER TO RETURN...

"OH, MY BROTHER," SCHAMRIAR CRIED "ONLY IN SOLITUDE CAN A MAN BE SPARED THE PAINS OF THIS VILE WORLD!"





THUS THE BROTHERS ABANDONED THEIR KINGDOMS AND JOURNEYED BY DAY AND BY NIGHT UNTIL THEY CAME UPON THE SHORE OF THE GREAT SALT SEA. AS THEY LAID DOWN TO REST, THEY WERE AWAKENED BY A MIGHTY **ROARING.**

THE SEA BROKE IN WAVES BEFORE THEM, AND FROM THE CHURNING WATERS, A BLACK PILLAR ROSE. FRIGHTENED, THE ROYAL BROTHERS HID THEMSELVES IN THE NEARBY BRUSH.



THEY BEHELD A **KRAKEN**...HUGE OF HEIGHT AND BURLY OF BREAST, BEARING ON HIS HEAD A CROWN OF GLEAMING CRYSTAL! THE BEAST WADED TO SHORE AND OPENED THE ARK, AND A PALE-SKINNED WOMAN EMERGED.

THE JINN CARESSED THE GIRL GENTLY, THEN LAY WITH HER UNDER A BURLY FIG, AND SLEPT WITH A NOISE THAT ROLLED LIKE PEALING THUNDER.



THE GIRL RESPONDED, "I DO NOT REQUIRE YOUR HELP, COME!" SHE DEMANDED. "GIVE ME YOUR LOVE, LEST I ROUSE THIS IFRIT TO SLAY YOU" STRAIGHTAWAY!"

* LEAVY: A MALICIOUS AND HOSTILE VARIETY OF JINNS, INFURIOUS TO MANKIND... --THE KORAN XXXII 99.

PRESENTLY THE GIRL SPIED THE ROYAL BROTHERS. SHE SIGNALD TO THEM TO JOIN HER, BUT BOTH QUIETLY REFUSED. "ALLAN EXCUSE US," SHAHRUAR WHISPERED. "THERE IS LITTLE WE CAN DO TO HELP YOU FROM YOUR FLIGHT!"

WHEREUPON THE KING SHAHRUAR AND KING SHAHIZEMAN PROCEEDED HALTINGLY TO DO AS SHE BID AND WHEN THEY HAD CONCLUDED SHE DEMANDED THEIR RINGS AS REVENGE AS A TOKEN OF THEIR LOVE!



"I WILL ADD THESE TWO TO THE FIVE NON-DRED RINGS I WEAR," SHE SMILED, "ALL TOKENS FROM MEN AS YOURSELVES." SHE LAUGHED AND DISMISSED THEM AS THE JINN, STOKED, AND THE BROTHERS WERE ONLY TOO GRATEFUL TO FLEE...



AND PONDERED THEIR LESSON WELL. "CONSIDER, OH BROTHER, THE WAYS OF THE LADY WITH THE IFRIT WHO IS SO MUCH MORE POWERFUL THAN WE," QUOTH HE PERIOD THAT WHICH HATH BEFALLEN HUA IS A GREATER MISHAP THAN THE SORROW WHICH FIVE BEAR.



THEREUPON THE KINGS RETURNED TO THEIR RESPECTIVE KINGDOMS DETERMINED NEVER AGAIN TO TRUST WOMANKIND! IN A MIGHTY JINN IS NAUGHT BEFORE A WOMAN'S WHIMS... THEN FRYE BROTHER, WHAT HOPE HAS MERE MAN!?





ONCE UPON HIS THRONE, KING SCHARRIAR ORDERED HIS CHIEF MINISTER TO SMITE HIS WIFE AND CONQUERED. THEY HAD FORSAKEN THEIR HUSBANDS AND MUST ANSWER FOR THEIR DECEPTION.

KING SCHARRIAR, MEANWHILE, SWORE TO HIMSELF THAT WHATEVER WOMAN HE WOULD HENCE TAKE WOULD BE SLAIN BEFORE SHE COULD DECEIVE.



KING SCHARRIAR THEN COMMANDED VIZIER TO BRING HIM A MAIDEN EACH NIGHT THAT HE MIGHT KNOW THE SWEET CONQUEST OF LOVE.



AND WHEN EACH MORNING DAWNED, TRUE TO HIS VOW, THE MONARCH DEMANDED HER GAVE. TRUE, NEVER COULD HE BE DECEIVED BY THE WOMEN HE HAD CLAIMED AS HIS OWN.

IN THIS MANNER, KING SHAHRIAR CONTINUED FOR THREE YEARS EACH NIGHT A MAIDEN WENT TO HIS CHAMBER ONLY TO BE SENT TO ALLAH THE NEXT MORN. THE CITIZENS CRIED OUT AGAINST THEIR KING'S IRON RULE CURSING HIM AND PRAYING FOR HIS DEATH.



MOTHERS WEEP AND PARENTS FLED WITH THEIR DAUGHTERS UNTIL THERE REMAINED IN THE CITY NOT A SINGLE BEAUTIFUL MAID!

YET THE KING ORDERED HIS VIZIER TO BRING HIM A MAIDEN AS WAS HIS WONT, AND THE MINISTER WENT FORTH SEARCHING AND FOUND NONE SO HE RETURNED IN SORROW FEARING HIS LIFE WOULD BE FORFEIT BY THE KING



THEN THE VIZIER REMEMBERED HIS OWN DAUGHTERS... SCHEHERAZADE AND DUNYAZAD - BEAUTIFUL, WELL-BRED GIRLS WELL-VERSED IN PHILOSOPHY AND THE SCIENCES

NOW ON THAT DAY THE ELDEST DAUGHTER NOTICED HER FATHER'S SADNESS AND QUESTIONED HIM AND THE VIZIER REVEALED ALL.



SCHEHERAZADE WAS DISMAYED THAT HER KING WOULD PROVE SO SELF-SERVING, BUT A PLAN FORMED IN THE WILY GIRL'S MIND. "LET ME SERVE THE KING THIS NIGHT," SHE REQUESTED, AND THE POOR MINISTER KNEW HE MUST COMPLY...



SCHEHERAZADE THEN CONSULTED HER SISTER "WHEN I AM IN THE PALACE, I SHALL SING FOR YOU, AND WHEN YOU ARRIVE YOU MUST SAY 'SISTER, TELL US ONE OF YOUR WONDERFUL STORIES TO PASS AWAY THE NIGHT!' THEN I SHALL MAKE TALES AND, WITH ALLAH'S HELP, SAVE THE REMAINING DAUGHTERS OF THE REALM."

AND WHEN NIGHT HAD FALLEN AND THE TIME WAS AT HAND, HER FATHER, THE VIZIER, SAPLY ESCORTED SCHEHERAZADE TO THE KING!





BUT WHEN THE KING APPROACHED HER, SHE WEEP. "WHAT AILETH THEE?" HE ASKED. AND SCHEHERAZADE REPLIED, "OH, SIRE, I HAVE A YOUNGER SISTER, AND WISH TO TAKE LEAVE OF HER BEFORE I SEE THE DAWN." SO THE KING SENT AT ONCE FOR DUNYAZAD AND WHEN SHE CAME SCHEHERAZADE GAVE HERSELF TO THE KING WILLINGLY. AFTERWARDS, SHE SIGNALLED TO HER YOUNGER SISTER WHO SAID: "ALLAH UPON THESE, ON MY SISTER, RECITE TO US A STORY TO WHILE AWAY THE HOURS UNTIL DAWN." "WITH JOY," ANSWERED SCHEHERAZADE, "IF THIS PIOUS AND AUSPICIOUS KING PERMITS ME." "TELL ON," QUOTH THE KING WHO CHANCED TO BE SLEEPLESS.

SO SCHEHERAZADE REJOICED. AND THUS, THE WILY GIRL COMMENCED A TALE SO STRUCTURED THAT THE MOST EXCITING PART FELL AT THE DAWN. THE SULTAN, EAGER TO HEAR THE REMAINDER, LET HER LIVE THAT SHE MIGHT FINISH HER STORY THE FOLLOWING NIGHT.

AFTER A THOUSAND NIGHTS AND A NIGHT THE TALE REMAINED UNFINISHED. BUT SCHEHERAZADE, WHO HAD GIVEN THE KING SEVERAL SONS, ASKED THAT HER LIFE BE PERMANENTLY SPARED.

JOYFULLY, THE KING COMPLIED AND THE NOBLE COUPLE LIVED HAPPILY EVER MORE.

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ONCE... FIVE, ONCE, IN INNOCENT YOUTH,
THINK A BALLAD OF HEROES BOLD.
IT SANG OF TREASURES AND
PLEASURE'S SWEET
IN THE MAWS OF HELLGATES' FOLD.
— W. D. BRYAN

MIGHT BE
AFRAID, NOT NOW.
NOT AFTER ALL THESE
YEARS. I'VE COME
TOO FAR!

THAT... THAT CASTLE
FATHER... IT FRIGHTENS
ME, SO DARK... SO HORRIBLE.
IT... IT FEELS... DREAD!

I, TOO, FEEL THE DREAD,
MY SON. THE DARKNESS
STILLNESS, THE ICY PIN-
NERS OF FEARSOME DEATH
AND YET... IT BECKONS
US, THE HORROR... THE
PRESSURE WITHIN. IT WIGGS
US TO ENTER. SO WE TOO
WILL BE CAPTIVES WITH
IN HELLGATES' ACCURSED
WALLS.

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY

I MUST KNOW THE
TRUTH. I MUST SEE
HE! WITH MY OWN EYES. I
MUST KNOW FOR CERTAIN
IF MY FATHER WAS
RIGHT.

FATHER... THAT
BEAUTIFUL MUSIC... CAN
YOU HEAR IT? IT'S SO...
SO SORROWFUL, LIKE
A WOMAN, FATHER, LIKE
A VERY SAD, VERY LONELY
WOMAN!

THERE IS NO MUSIC SON,
NO SORROWFUL WOMAN.
IT IS A TRICK OF THE WIND,
A TRAP OF THE WILY CREA-
TURES WITHIN. THEY WANT
US, DREADING... THE HORROR-
BLE HELLSPAWN BEASTS!

THERE ARE GHOSTS THERE,
MY SON. RESTLESS SPEC-
TRES OF A THOUSAND KNIGHTS
TRAPPED IN ETERNAL TOL-
MENT. THE CRIES YOU HEAR
ARE ONLY THEIR... BEGGING
US TO FLEE!



MANY ARE LURED BY THE MUSIC...THE LEGEND...OR THE PROMISE OF LOVE AND WEALTH. THE LEGEND IS A SIMPLE ONE...SIMPLER THAN A CHILD'S RHYME.

WARRIORS HAVE TRAVERSED CONTINENTS TO PUT THEIR SKILLS...THEIR WIGHT, AGAINST THE TREASURES THAT LURE WITHIN.

IT TELLS OF A SLEEPING PRINCESS WHO LIES ON A BED OF GOLD... SHOULD A NOBLE MAN AWAKEN HER, FREE HER WITH A KISS, THE PRINCESS, HER TREASURES, HER PLEDGERS WILL BE HIS FOREVER MORE.

MANY BRAVE MEN HAVE CLIMBED THOSE GRANITE STEPS TO HELL. YET, TO THIS DAY, NONE HAVE EVER RETURNED.



THE MUSIC IS A LURE. / THE LEGEND IS THE BAIT. AND MANY A VALIANT WARRIOR HAS FORGOTTEN HIS LIFE... HIS SOUL... FOR NOTHING MORE THAN... AN ILLUSION!

BUT *WHEN* HADN'T? HOW DID THIS COME TO *BE*?

IT BEGAN YEARS AGO, MY BOY... BEFORE YOUR MOTHER GAVE YOU BIRTH, A PRINCE RESIDED IN HELLSGATE. THEN... A NOBLE AND GENTLE FLURRY, HE WAS A GOOD MAN... A JUST MAN... BUT HE WAS A SAD AND LONELY MAN.

HE WANTED MORE THAN ALL ELSE TO LIVE A NORMAL LIFE, TO LOVE, TO MARRY, TO CARESS A LOVING WIFE AND GIVE MANY CHILDREN.



ALAS, THERE WERE NO MAGES TO CAPTURE HIS LONGING HEART. UNTIL THAT FATEFUL DAY WHEN, QUOTE BY CHANCE, HE MET THE PAIR AURORA.

SHE WAS A PEASANT GIRL, FAR BELOW HIS PRINCELY STATION. YET, WHEN THEIR EYES MET, THE *AMAZING* OF AGES CHURNED LONGINGLY BETWEEN THEM.

THEY WERE *ABSORBED*, AND LIVED *NATURALLY* IN HELLSGATE CASTLE. IT WAS A FAR DIFFERENT ABODE IN THOSE DAYS. BRIGHT, CHEERY, ECHOING WITH AURORA'S MELODIOUS LAUGHTER.



AND YET, AS HAPPY AS THE PRINCE'S NEW LIFE SEEMED, AS WHOLE AND CONTENT AS HE FELT WITH HIS BRIDE, THE MONARCH SENSED SOMETHING *JAWNY*... SOME TERRIBLE *NOVOROC* AFOOT.

HE COULD NOT IDENTIFY THE OFFENSIVE FANGS. HE KNEW ONLY THAT THEY MADE HIM *ILL* AT *WISE*.



AURORA REMIND IT ALSO. FOR EACH NIGHT SHE WOULD CLING TO HER HUSBAND IN A NERVOUS DANCE, AS THOUGH SHE FELT SISTER EYES GLARING AT HER FROM THE RECARPENT'S DANGEROUS DARK.



THEN THE GIRL SORROWFULLY
RELENTED. TEARS ROLLING
IN HER EYES, SHE SOBBED
RHEUMATICALLY, CROAKING OUT
HER WORDS, REVEALING THE
BITTER SECRETS SHE HAD
HIDDEN FROM HER HUSBAND.

"I... I MADE A PACT," SHE
CRIED. "TO BE WITH YOU,
TO BE YOUR WIFE... YOUR
PRINCESS!"

"IS THIS ALL CON-
TRIVED TO FRIGHTEN
THE UNKNOWN?"

"A DEVIL OFFERED ME YOUR
LOVE... IN EXCHANGE FOR
MY SOUL... AND OUR FIRST
BORN CHILD!"

"I... I AM A SOULLESS WOMAN!
HE CLAIMED THAT PART OF ME
LIVED AGO... AND SOON... SOON...
HE'LL COME AGAIN... FOR THE
FINAL PAYMENT IN OUR
HELLISH PACT..."

"FOR EVEN NOW, MY HUSBAND,
MY PRINCE... THE LIFE OF OUR
FIRST BORN STIRS GREATLY
WITHIN MY WOMB!"

THE PRINCE WAILED SORROWFULLY
"NO! NO! HOW CAN THIS BE?
YOU NEEDED NO PACT WITH THE
DEVIL TO SECURE MY LOVE.
I GAVE IT TO YOU FREELY!"

"BUT NOW... NOW... WHAT CAN WE
DO?" ALICIA WAILED. "HOW CAN
WE THwart THE DEVIL SURE
TO COME?"

"WE SHALL STAND AND FIGHT,"
THE PRINCE VOWED. "THAT I
GLADLY DO FOR YOU AND OUR
CHILD." - AND WITH THIS OATH,
THE PRINCE PREPARED FOR
THE INEVITABLE CONFRONTATION.

"OR IS THERE MORE?
MORE WERE THAN
ANY MAN KNOWS?"

ILLUSIONS ALONE
COULD NOT HAVE SLAIN
EACH AND EVERY
CELESTIAL ANGEL

THE CHILD CAME ON A STORGIUS NIGHT. A SON! A GLORIOUS HEIR TO HIS FATHER'S THRONE. THE PRINCE WAS PROUD, PLEASED BY THIS MOST PRECIOUS GIFT FROM HIS WIFE. YET, HE WAS READY, ALSO... TO FACE THE HELLSPAWN HE KNEW WOULD COME.

AND COME IT DID. IN THE SICKENING FORM OF A NINE-HEADED SERPENT. IT ASSAILED THE CASTLE, SWIFTLY, SILENTLY, SMOTHERING TOWARD THE NURSERY TO CLAIM ITS PRECIOUS PRIZE.

BUT THE PRINCE WAS THERE, WAITING! LURKING IN CONCEALING SHADOWS, THE DEMON-THING CREEPT CLOSER... CLOSER TO THE CHILD. ITS HOT BREATH SCORCHED THE BABE'S SATIN SKIN.

THE PRINCE'S BLADE FLASHED BUT ONCE. AND A MONSTROUS HEAD FELL CLUTTERED UPON THE FLOOR, POOLING RED RIVULETS OF BLOOD.

THE CREATURE WHISPERED IN PAIN, ITS REMAINING HEADS COLLAPSING FOR THIS LUNGE. THE PRINCE WAS READY, HIS SWORD PREPARED. BUT THE ATTACK DID NOT COME!

INSTEAD, THE DEMON-THING HURLED A CURSE, IN A SICKENING, SNAKEY TONGUE. IT FOLLOWS THE AIR WITH THE STENCH OF DEATH, STABBING THE PRINCE WITH AN ICY BLADE OF PAIN.

"YOU WANT YOUR CHILD WHILF I THEN KEEP THE LONGBONE BEAST? HA TAKE, INSTEAD, ALL THAT IS YOURS... YOUR CASTLE AND YOUR WIFE!"

"YOU'LL FEEL HER GONE-NESS NEVERMORE. FOR NOW, DUE TO THE WHIRL OF DEATH, MANY MEN WILL KISS HER LOVE. BUT NONE WILL REMAIN HER TROUPE!"

THE PRINCE BRANCHED THE PRINCE FROM HIS OWN ARCADE, AND SLOWLY... THE CASTLE CHAMBERS DEFILED. SWARM AND HELLSPAWN HORDS CLAIMED ITS ONCE-FAIR HALLS. THE STENCH OF DEATH FILLED THE AIR... AND, ALAS, FAIR AUCURA WAS BURNED DEAD... AND ALAS.



8
SUT... WHAT OF THE PRINCE, FATHER...
AND HIS INFANT SON?

THE PRINCE TOOK TO THE VILLAGE TO
RAISE HIS ONLY SON. HE IS NOW A HANDLED
MAN, BROKEN, HURTING YET FROM THE
MEMORIES OF HIS PALE AURORA'S LOVE...

BUT HIS SON IS GROWING STRAIGHT AND
TALL... AND SOMEDAY SOON... YOU'LL BE
A MAN!

IS HE
GONE, FATHER?

YOU, MY SON... YOU ARE THE NEW PRINCE
THE RIGHTFUL HEIR TO HILLGATE
CASTLE. SOMEDAY, PERHAPS, YOU CAN
SUCCEED WHERE MANY BRAVE MEN
HAVE FAILED...

AND SAVE YOUR
MOTHER FROM A
DEMON'S SPELL!

NOW... NOW...
THE PATH IS SAFE
THE PRINCESS CAN
BE SAVED!

THE PRINCESS
PALE AURORA...
MOTHER!





I AM HERE, MOTHER,
ASIDE YOUR GLADDER BEP, AS
YOUNG TO PARTHEN,
LONG AGO.

YES, CAN
THIS TRULY BE?

LIPS SO WARM,
SO SWEET, SO FAIR,
SO YOUNG... A MOTHER
NOT AT ALL!

MORE...



...MORE... **LOVER**
SENSUOUS, GENTLE, FAIR.



NO... NO...!



I KNOW
TOO LATE!

UNDERSTANDING
COMES WITH **DEATH**!
NO WARRIOR... NO MAN...
NO MATTER HIS STRENGTH,
CAN THREAT THE
DEVIL'S CURSE!

MOTHER... LOVELY
MOTHER, IS HERSELF A
DANCING-THUMB! A
DEATHLY-ACCUSED
HELL STAIR...
EVER MORE!



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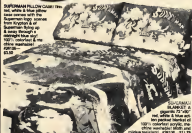
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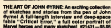
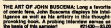
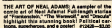


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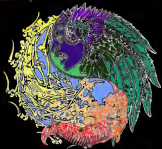
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